

# EDUCATION news

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## Superintendent's Message

The Challenge school district reform initiative has blossomed from a small, intrepid group of 10 districts who were willing to dream about what a comprehensive reform would look like, to a sturdy group of 56 districts who "put the meat on the bones" of the Challenge elements. Now, as we close the 1997 school year, the Challenge Network has made a significant contribution to the research and development of standards, assessment, and accountability in California.

Teams of district and California Department of Education staff have developed toolkits in each of the Challenge learning support elements. This has been an unprecedented partnership between state and local staffs, parents, and students to build a new model for 21st century schools.

In 1997-98 we look forward to adding districts to the Challenge Network. Over 100 districts and county offices of education met in Sacramento in May to find out more about the Challenge. Challenge superintendents and staffs shared with their colleagues the benefits of joining the Challenge Network. A few of these stories are included in this newsletter. Districts have universal praise for the opportunity to work together to "think outside the box."



***The Challenge calls for us all — students, parents, educators, and communities — to embrace a simple but powerful concept: that we measure success by gains in student achievement based on standards.***

Challenge districts will be ahead of the game as they face the prospect of measuring up to high expectations for standards, assessment, and accountability. They will continue to be a research and development network which takes the lead in implementing new phases of the accountability system. A cadre of "Mentor" Challenge districts will also help others implement a standards-based educational program.

What is the best news about the Challenge? It works for all sizes, locations, and economic conditions in districts. Most importantly, it works for all students. There are no prerequisites for joining the Challenge other than a commitment from all the district's stakeholders—board members, superintendent, staff, unions, parents, and students—to work together to implement the Challenge. Challenge districts report that the reform has added "leverage" to their local strategic planning...it has given their efforts "focus."

Challenge districts have made a trail for others to follow. We look forward to continuing the journey.

***Delaine Eastin,***  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction



## Elements of the Challenge

Content and performance standards at every grade level in every subject area

A comprehensive assessment and accountability system to measure student performance annually

Safe, secure schools and a healthy environment

Clean, well-lit schools with technology

Family-school-community partnerships

Student learning plans tailored to each student's needs

School-based decision making

Staff and community training in the elements of the Challenge

Rigorous high school graduation requirements, calling for student mastery of 18 year-long courses

A Golden State Achievement Certificate, beginning with the Class of 2004, to replace the current high school diploma

## The Challenge's Focus:

Students and standards at center stage

The Challenge is built around one central focus: students working to meet high academic standards across the curriculum. The goal of the Challenge is to make any changes necessary at the school and in the classroom to substantially increase student achievement in terms of those standards.

What are standards?

Standards are clear, specific descriptions of the knowledge, understanding, and skills that students are to achieve grade level by grade level and subject area by subject area. The standards identify the core or essential components of the curriculum—what all students are to learn year by year.

Why have standards?

Standards establish a powerful consensus and partnership in local communities, school districts, schools, and classrooms around explicit academic goals and expectations. To the degree that they are clear and specific, these standards allow teachers, parents, and students to focus on essential learning, to know whether students are learning what they need to know, and to take timely action to provide focused assistance when it is necessary so that all students meet the standards. Standards also allow those who

are outside the schools, such as taxpayers, legislators, businesses, and institutions of higher education, to know whether our schools are succeeding in preparing students for their roles in the 21st century.

The Challenge Standards

The Challenge Standards have been created collaboratively by teachers and curriculum specialists from the Challenge districts in partnership with the California Department of Education. First created in the fall of 1995, the standards are currently undergoing revision to include samples of student work that can serve as benchmarks for setting local standards for student performance. When the statewide Commission for the Establishment of Academic Content and Performance Standards completes its work this fall in language arts and mathematics (and next summer in history-social science and science), the Challenge Standards will be aligned to those statewide standards and will continue to be developed to provide the guidance necessary for establishing clear and comparable levels of student performance and for implementing a system of local school improvement that will lead to substantial, measurable increases in student achievement.

# High Academic Standards

## Standards-based education

Standards are an essential component of a school system dedicated to continuous improvement in student achievement. They provide the central focus for local efforts to:

- improve curriculum and instruction;
- challenge students to create work of the highest quality;
- consistently evaluate the level of achievement of all students;
- report on student achievement to the public; and
- guide the systemic changes necessary to ensure continuous increases in the quality of student work.

## The Challenge

The Challenge is dedicated to just such systemic reform—with standards and student achievement at center stage. The Challenge provides an opportunity for school districts and the California Department of Education to work together to improve the quality of education we offer to our students—holding ourselves accountable for reaching our essential educational goal—substantial, measurable increases in student achievement.

## In the immediate future

The revised Challenge Standards in language arts and mathematics will be available for the first time at the “School’s In” symposium to be held in Sacramento on August 11-14 (see back page).

In addition, developmental work continues in all other content areas. The standards are being revised, and student work is being collected, in the areas of history-social science, science, health, and physical education for implementation (and the reporting of individual student results) in the 1998-99 school year. Work on standards is also continuing in visual and performing arts, foreign languages, career education, service learning, and applied learning, moving towards implementation in the 1999-2000 school year.

## Participation in the Challenge

Participation in the Challenge is one of the most effective means of working towards local school improvement, assisting school districts in the development and implementation of their local standards, meeting the need for alignment with federal expectations for Title I, and ultimately, helping all students reach higher levels of achievement than ever before.



# Publications Available

Several new publications from the California Department of Education are available regarding the Challenge. Two books present content and performance standards in language arts and mathematics, while the Challenge Toolkit booklets address other important Challenge issues.

## Challenge Standards

*Challenge Standards for Student Success: Language Arts* and *Challenge Standards for Student Success: Mathematics* present revised standards in language arts and math that set higher achievement goals for students and suggest methods for evaluating students' performance.

## The Challenge Toolkit Series

The *Challenge Toolkit* is a series of eight publications described below:

- **Family-School Compacts** is a publication that describes how to include the family in a child's education and how family-school compacts can be developed. When families and schools work together in their children's schooling, grades and attendance rates improve.

- **Outline for Assessment and Accountability Plans** will guide school district personnel in preparing the assessment plan contained in the Challenge. The plan outlines how the progress of all students will be measured against new and rigorous content and performance standards.

- Schools should be safe harbors for children amid the world's pressures. In **Safe and Healthy Schools**, educators and planners are provided with strategies for creating a safe and healthful environment for learning.

- All students have the right to attend schools on campuses that are safe and secure. Standards set forth in **School Facilities** can help planners to design and retrofit school facilities to create an orderly, purposeful, and safe environment.

- **Site-Based Decision Making** will help school district personnel to make the transition to school-based decision making. Decisions made at the school level often have greater potential for efficacy and creativity.

- **Service-Learning** outlines the principles of service-learning and describes model projects. The knowledge and skills students learn in school are powerfully reinforced when students apply them in service projects in their communities.

- A comprehensive program of student activities in and out of school can enrich and extend the academic program. **Student Activities** provides guidance in developing such programs.

- **Student Learning Plans** provides useful information and guidance in setting up a student learning plan, which is a shared statement of expectations, achievements, interventions, and supports that is developed by each student together with his or her parents and teachers and is updated periodically.

For ordering information, contact the California Department of Education, Publications Division, Sales Office at P.O. Box 271, Sacramento, CA 95812-0271; or call toll free 1-800-995-4099.

## All San Francisco Students To Take Rigorous Curriculum

The San Francisco Unified School District has become one of the first California districts to require all high school students to complete a rigorous college preparatory curriculum in order to graduate.

Superintendent Waldemar Rojas said, "The time was overdue for San Francisco Unified to establish standards and increase high school graduation requirements. Our participation in the Challenge Initiative has supported us in this process.

"Each and every student graduating from high school and entering the 21st century should be prepared for both college and the world of work. Achieving this goal requires a higher level of skills and knowledge than ever before. Presently, students graduate from high school with a minimum of two years in math that includes algebraic topics and just one year of laboratory science. This level of preparation is not sufficient for the challenges facing students in post secondary or career opportunities."

The proposal to increase graduation requirements, supported by the teachers and the PTA, and adopted unanimously by the school board, requires entering ninth graders in Fall 1997 to take three years of college preparatory math and science, an increase of one year each from the present state requirements. The students will also take one more year of visual and performing arts and one more year of world/foreign language study.

In addition, students who take, for example, algebra in the eighth grade or who have foreign language competence will be able to test out of some courses, allowing them to take Advanced Placement and other high-level academics. All students will be required to graduate with at least 240 credits; at present students can graduate with 220 credits.

For more information, contact Winnie Tang, Special Assistant to the Superintendent, at (415) 241-6054.

## Pasadena Emphasizes Professional Development

Two important elements of the Challenge are staff and community training, and school-site decision making. To further these efforts, the Pasadena Unified School District will establish a new Professional Development Center, which will plan a comprehensive training and support system for over 350 district teachers and administrators. The Center will be a collaborative effort with the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP), the Ford Foundation, and the California State University System.

Vera Vignes, Pasadena's superintendent, explains that the Center's primary intent will be to raise student achievement by focusing on preservice training for individuals pursuing teaching credentials; orientation and professional development for first- and second-year teachers; and ongoing training for all district teachers.

To judge the Center's effectiveness, the district will be asking: Has student performance improved? Are the professional development activities actually being implemented in the classrooms, and what is the result in terms of student performance? Are teachers better prepared to teach? Is there greater teacher stability in the schools? Has higher education changed its teacher preparation and professional development programs to support the efforts in the schools?

The Center will embark on various activities, including a redesign of the preservice teacher preparation program to emphasize English language and literacy acquisition, the Challenge Standards, the frameworks, assessment, and effective teaching strategies that build on technology. Teachers will be key players in these activities, and 50 teachers will be selected to serve as mentors to new teachers.

For more information, contact Thelma Melendez de Santa Ana, Office of Instruction, at (818) 568-4517.

## Buckeye To Design New School Report Cards

The 3400-student Buckeye Union School District, in the Sierra foothills, has been working over the past 18 months to develop new assessment practices to provide more information on how each student is performing and how to help each student perform at a higher level. According to Superintendent Joyce Flanigan, this Challenge district initiated several changes in assessment:

- For the first time, students in second through eighth grade took a new standardized test, which is better aligned with the district's instructional standards and the state frameworks than its previous test. Based on the percentage of items their child answered correctly, parents will be informed next year whether their child is performing "below," "at," or "above" district-level standards.

- Students in grades K-8 took performance assessments for English/language arts and mathematics. These tasks measure whether students can write to communicate and use problem-solving strategies to show understanding of mathematical concepts—skills which cannot be measured on a standardized test. Student work will be given a rating of "below," "at," or "above" grade-level standards.

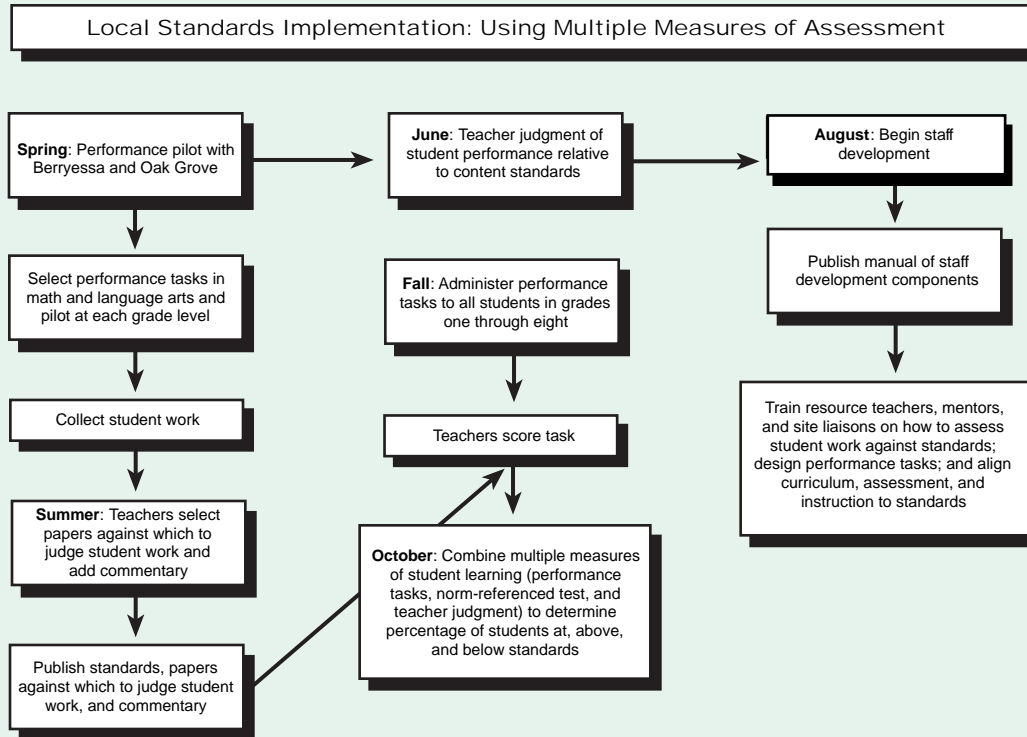
Next year, parents will receive information on how their children performed on both assessments and classroom work. Buckeye elementary schools will have a new report card which lists standards for each grade level, reports how students are performing based on these standards, and gives specific information on how to increase performance.

For more information, contact Joyce Flanigan, Superintendent, at (916) 677-2261.



## Cupertino Joins With Oak Grove And Berryessa

The Challenge Network for Standards, Assessment, and Accountability has allowed the Cupertino Union School District to network with other districts in new ways. For example, Cupertino has established a unique partnership with two other Challenge districts—Oak Grove and Berryessa—to pilot a series of performance tasks this spring, with districtwide performance assessment planned for the fall of 1997. The following flow chart describes how work on assessment, based on local content standards, is proceeding. For more information, contact John Erkman, Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, at (408) 252-3000, extension 611.



## Orcutt Networks With Other Challenge Districts

The Orcutt Union Elementary School District in Santa Maria is working on its assessment and accountability plan for the Challenge, networking with other districts throughout the state.

Using the Challenge standards and numerous national standards documents, Orcutt first developed its own district standards. Next, the district adopted a state-approved, norm-referenced test for grades two through eight, followed by the development of “on-demand” tasks and related scoring guides for kindergarten through grade eight. Orcutt is now planning to train all principals and teachers to make standards-based judgments about student work.

Orcutt Superintendent Jack Garvin explains, “Orcutt’s Standards and Assessment Committee, comprised of teachers from all grades and subject areas, has coordinated this effort. Our principals and board of trustees have been informed every step of the way, and their support has been key to the program’s success.”

He continued, “The statewide Challenge Standards, Assessment, and Accountability Network has allowed us to proceed with confidence and feel that we are not doing this work alone. Quite simply, we could not have progressed to the point where we are now without being a part of the Challenge Network. This work has brought uncommon focus to instruction and assessment. For the first time, we see the hope of a relationship between what we teach and test.”

For more information, contact Associate Superintendent Ken Parker, Instructional Media Center, Orcutt Union School District, at (805) 937-5699.

## San Juan Moves Ahead With Standards

Standards are not new in the San Juan Unified School District in suburban Sacramento. “More than five years ago, language arts teachers began defining what students should know and be able to do, and the standards have been refined each year since then,” explains Superintendent Ray Tolleson.

This February, the school board approved K-6 content standards in language arts and math and 7-12 standards for all subject areas; in March, the board approved a plan for assessing standards using nationally normed achievement tests, district-wide standardized assessments, and samples of student work collected over time.

English teachers were confident that they could assess student writing easily—a little too confident, as it turned out. They assumed that scores of 1 and 2 would represent below-standard work (they did), that scores of 5 and 6 would represent above-standard work (they did), and that scores of 3 and 4 would represent work at the standard (maybe not).

Almost one-third of the papers received a “3.” Therefore, district results would be tremendously impacted by whether a “3” was “at” or “below” the standard. The more teachers read papers with scores of “3,” the more they felt that these did not quite meet the standard.

This concern, along with sample papers, was shared with principals and parent groups, who agreed. The question that helped make the final decision was “Could this student work be published in the newspaper, under your name, as an example of student work at the standard level?”

Because San Juan is a Challenge district, teachers were able to share papers with their teacher-partners from Los Angeles, Santa Maria, and Redding, who concurred with San Juan’s decision that a “3” did not meet the writing standard. So now the standard has been set at a “4.” Next year, San Juan language arts teachers hope to involve parents and business community representatives in scoring, so that the community better understands district standards and assessments.

For more information, contact Lynda Holmes, Curriculum Director for grades 7-12, at (916) 971-7130.

# School's In! Symposium

The California Department of Education will convene a statewide symposium at the Sacramento Convention Center—"School's In! The State Superintendent's Symposium on Critical Issues for California Schools." This symposium on August 11 to 14 will provide the latest information for schools, districts, and communities on issues that will impact education in California for the 1997-98 school year and beyond.

The symposium is open to anyone interested in education, including administrators, teachers, board members, parents, and support staff. The symposium is designed to save districts money by consolidating several conferences at one place and time, and to foster dialogue and collaboration between and among education staff at schools.

The organization of "School's In!" will feature a specific theme for each of the four days. The theme for the first day is *Educational Technology*. Day two will focus on *Teacher Preparation, Recruitment, and Professional Development*. Day three will take a close look at *Standards and Assessment*, and day four will be devoted to

## *Accountability and Evaluation.*

Information on curriculum and school operations will be presented in breakout sessions that emphasize best practices in schools and districts and provide current information about education in California. Also scheduled will be breakout sessions on school-to-career and workforce preparation, welfare reform and its impact on schools, and new laws and regulations pertaining to schools.

Special events will include student visual and performing arts presentations, a Family and Community Forum, a New American Schools Design Fair, and a Teacher Preparation and Recruiting Fair. A partnership has recently developed between the California Department of Education and the New American Schools Corporation. New American Schools represent an unprecedented effort to bring together comprehensive, whole-school change with system-level restructuring to establish excellence in schools and districts throughout the country. The New American Schools will

present a two-day design fair, as well as convene special sessions about the philosophies and organizational structures of the school restructuring designs they represent.

Also included within the symposium sessions will be a major emphasis on the Challenge Initiative, which has at its core a commitment to increased student achievement through standards-based education. In combination with the New American Schools Design Fair, the Challenge Initiative presentations will provide opportunities for symposium attendees to hear about and discuss national and statewide models for increasing student success. Nationally recognized speakers will be presenting at the lunch sessions.

Registration forms have been sent to every school in the state. Registration materials are also available on the California Department of Education website: <<http://www.cde.ca.gov>>. Registration costs \$120 through July, and \$150 at the door.

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Delaine Eastin,  
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Ruth McKenna,  
Chief Deputy Superintendent

Susan Lange,  
Deputy Superintendent

Curt Robinson,  
Editor in Chief

Joe Radding,  
Managing Editor

Janice Lowen Agee,  
Education News Editor

Steve Yee,  
Graphic Designer

Cheryl McDonald  
Contributing Artist